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Reagan's Number Two

Columnist Patrick Buchanan sheathed his pen in February and walked away from a \$400,000-a-year income as one of America's most influential—and acidic—pundits. Buchanan, 46, wasn't dropping out of the political arena: as Ronald Reagan's new director of communications, he was simply moving from the press box onto the playing field. And during his first Oval Office performance, Buchanan showed he could play the game. Discussing how to respond to the roughing up

of a South Korean dissident, some aides wanted Reagan to press for a *mea culpa* from South Korea. "The president of the United States doesn't worry about who pushes whom at airports," said Buchanan. "The president of the United States cares about the fact that Korea has been a friend of the U.S. for 35 years." Reagan, says one participant, "listened with an attitude [of] 'this is a guy whose advice I trust already'."

Maybe that's because Reagan has been listening to Buchanan for years—as a panelist on the McLaughlin Group TV talk show. But whatever the reason, after only two months on the job Buchanan is emerging as the No. 2 man on the White House staff—second only to chief of staff Donald Regan. Last week, when the White House announced that Reagan, Treasury Secretary James Baker and Attorney General Edwin Meese would head two new cabinet councils, one reporter immediately asked, "What does this do to the new-found power of Patrick J. Buchanan?"

The answer is not much. From his White House office midway between Reagan's and Regan's, Buchanan helps develop and coordinate White House strategy on the hot issues of the moment, from the federal budget to Nicaragua's contra rebels. He has taken over the crucial office of public liaison and is expected to inherit much of the presidential image-making portfolio when Michael Deaver leaves the White House next month. And NEWSWEEK has learned that less than a month ago Reagan gave Buchanan control of the White House press office.

One top Reagan aide warns that Buchanan's expanding influence may eventually run afoul of Reagan. "Don will never tolerate sharing the power—or the glory," says the

aide. But Regan praises his subordinate's "ability to recognize very quickly that if his point of view won't hold, [he should] adopt the point of view the president wants." Another staffer remarks that the feisty conservative has been surprisingly respectful: "He rarely speaks up unless asked for his opinion—but he's usually the first to be asked."

Cliff: Sometimes Reagan and Regan buy Buchanan's advice, as they did on vetoing Congress's farm-relief bill. But at other times, senior White House officials say, Buchanan's approach is politically dangerous. A visceral anticommunist, he pushed for a prime-time Reagan appeal for covert aid to the contras—a sure loser in the eyes of Regan and media master Deaver. Some aides warn that Buchanan could get in trouble down the road. Right now, they argue, Buchanan, Reagan and even congressional leaders are in agreement over which issues must be addressed—from the budget to Soviet relations. But what happens 18 months from now? Buchanan, a fierce conservative on social issues, may be tempted to try to turn Reagan's attention to issues like abortion and school prayer. If he does, they predict, he will lose. "I'm not sure Pat understands Ronald Reagan," says one longtime aide. "Pat's a hard-line conservative, and most hard-line conservatives want Ronald Reagan to jump off the cliff with the flag flying. That's not Reagan's style."

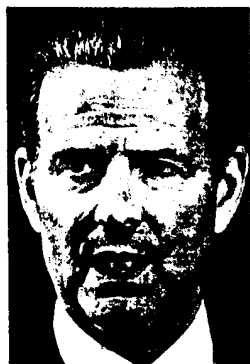
So far, Buchanan's transition from out-



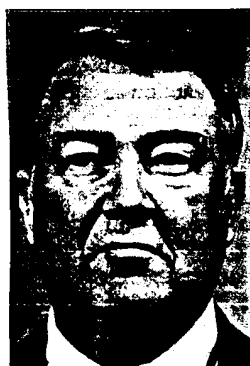
Buchanan: 'No comment—and that's off the record'

spoken columnist to invisible power broker has seemingly been painless. Buchanan—the first White House communications director to totally shun the press—seems content to exercise his power quietly. When a reporter manages to ambush Buchanan with a substantive question, his standard response is, "No comment—and that's off the record." NEWSWEEK, however, did manage to get a real answer last week. When asked how he likes what he's doing, Buchanan began and ended the interview with: "I love it. I love it. It's a great job. I love it."

NEAL KARLEN with THOMAS M. DeFRANK and MARGARET GARRARD WARNER in Washington and ELEANOR CLIFT in Santa Barbara



Jim Baker



Ed Meese